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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2107
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The Honorable Michael K. Powell
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing with respect to public safety communications. In particular, I wish to comment upon the Commission's public interest responsibility in assuring public safety entities that they possess the spectrum resources requisite for performing their important duties for communities around the country.

As you well know, the Congress has acted in a number of instances in recent years to address the telecommunications needs of public safety entities. Congress enacted in 1997, budget-related provisions directing the Commission to set aside certain spectrum for future law enforcement use; in 1999, Congress enacted P.L. 106-81, which established 911 as the ubiquitous emergency number nationally and promoted the development in the States of enhanced 911 capabilities and related functions; and most recently, both House and Senate this session have passed grant program authorizations to assist public safety answering points in handling wireless calls. Hopefully this last measure will see quick legislative action in the upcoming session.

Without question, it is incumbent upon Congress to do even more to assist public safety entities, especially in the area of basic funding assistance for the communications infrastructure and interoperability requirements of public safety entities. Yet while Congress still has important work to do in this area, the Commission has the ability to assist public safety in a critical important area, namely the short and long-term spectrum needs of public safety entities.

During the August recess, I hosted a meeting in my congressional district which was attended by dozens of police and fire chiefs for local and regional authorities, FEMA and state law enforcement entities. At this meeting it quickly became clear that interference mitigation, interoperability, and the long-term emergency communications requirements of these jurisdictions were key concerns. As Terence Reardon, Chief of the Revere, Massachusetts, Police Department mentioned in a letter recently, one key problem is that "the technologies used by public safety and commercial wireless entities are mismatched with one another when they are located on channels close to each other.

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The result: hazardous and risky interference, which causes distorted and jumbled communications and prevents our public safety officials from doing their job."

I understand the Commission is currently considering proposals to resolve some of these issues, including the so-called "Consensus Plan." I have been contacted in support of this plan by the North Eastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council, the Metropolitan Law Enforcement Council, and the Greater Boston Police Council, in addition to many individual local chiefs of police and fire departments in eastern Massachusetts. Collectively these entities represent over 400 law enforcement jurisdictions and thousands of uniformed first responders.

The Consensus Plan is a laudable, pro-active attempt to address key issues affecting public safety entities. I encourage the Commission to utilize the policy blueprint offered by the Plan as a basis to resolve outstanding issues in a timely manner. Thank you in advance for your time and attention to these important public safety spectrum issues, which I know you agree go to the heart of the Commission's mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Edward J. Markey
Ranking Democrat
House Subcommittee on
Telecommunication and the Internet